SPECIAL EDITION: TOP PLAYERS AND COACH OF THE YEAR, PAGES 4 AND 5

CCAA MEN'S NATIONALS

NIAGARA NEWS

THE COMMUNITY PAPER OF NIAGARA COLLEGE

FREE | March 7, 2013 | SPECIAL EDITION

Game face on

Niagara College opens its doors to volleyball championships

From left: Niagara Knights' players Brad Wall, Millar Galbraith, Shayne Petrusma and Head Coach Nathan Groenveld sit together after last practice before the national men's volleyball tournament at Niagara College. The Knights foursome answered questions from the media after a morning practice yesterday.

Photo by Jordan Aubertin

By JEFF JOHNSTON
Staff Writer

Eight teams will compete for the Men's Canadian College Athletic Association (CCAA) National Championships starting today at the Niagara College Welland campus Athletic Centre.

From the Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference (ACAC), the Red Deer College Kings are ranked No. 1 in the tournament and the SAIT Trojans of Calgary are in fourth, giving Alberta high hopes for a victory.

Just behind are two strong teams from the PACWEST league in British Columbia. Capilano University Blues of North Vancouver and the Vancouver Island University Mariners are ranked No. 2 and No. 5 respectively.

After winning the Ontario Colleges Athletic Association (OCAA) championship on Feb. 23, Nipissing University Lakers improved their ranking to No. 3 in Canada knocking the hosting Niagara College Knights down to No. 7.

The Outaouais Griffons will make their second appearance at Niagara College this season coming at No. 6 as the top team in the Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec (RSEQ).

The wildcard team from the Atlantic Collegiate Athletic Association (ACAA) is the University of King's College Blue Devils of Halifax.

Follow all the action live at niagara-news.com

TEAM PROFILES

Home team ready for home stand

By JEFF JOHNSTON
Staff Writer

After a fourth place finish at the Ontario Colleges Athletic Association (OCAA) championships, the Niagara Knights men's volleyball team look to redeem themselves in front of their home crowd at the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) Men's Volleyball Championships, this week at the Niagara College Welland campus Athletic Centre, from March 7 to March 9.

"We're really excited as a program," says head coach Nathan Groenveld. "It's a great opportunity for our students to compete in front of friends, family and fellow students. It's going to be a great tournament."

Groenveld has the team in preparation mode to face Canada's toughest opponents.

"We're extremely confident," he says. "There were a lot of upsets in PACWEST [the British Columbia college league] over the weekend. It's not who we thought would be coming. So, we'll take a look at some video this week and get a game plan ready for Thursday night."

Top players from the Knights squad are excited to perform in front of the home crowd and are feeling confident about their chances.

With Knights outside hitter Shayne Petrusma being named All-Canadian on Feb. 21 along with the other accolades he has collected this year, including CCAA volleyball player of the month in January, OCAA athlete of the month in December and most valuable player of the Niagara College Volleyball Invitational, one might think his trophy case is getting full.

Niagara Knights at their last practice before the CCAA men's volleyball tournament taking place at Niagara College from March 7 to March 9.

Photo by Jordan Aubertin

"It's pretty full, but hopefully there's still room in there for a national championship," Petrusma says.

He leads the team in nearly every statistical category including kills, digs and points.

Niagara's other weapons include setter Brad Wall and outside hitter Jeff Scott.

Wall says he will be looking to spread the ball out evenly among the team members and playing the effective quick-set spike attack with middle blocker Sam Youlton.

"It's all about defensive intensity for us," says Wall. "Once we're involved defensively the offence just roles from there."

Scott talked about the struggles in the OCAA finals two weeks ago.

"I think [last weekend] we had trouble staying together as a team," says Scott. "It's going to be a really big key coming into the nationals. We've got to stay together as a team, play together as a team, and win every point as a team."

Although the team lost momentum, Scott is confident that they regain it.

"Momentum is a funny thing Especially with this sport, momentum is key. As soon as you lose it, you can gain it back just as quickly," he says.

The Niagara Knights will play their first game on Thursday at 8 p.m. against Capilano University of North Vancouver.

Lakers know how to win when it matters most

Frankie Edgecombe spikes a set from Taylor Biebly.

Submitted photo

By JEFF JOHNSTON
Staff Writer

Things didn't start out well for the Nipissing University Lakers of North Bay in 2013, but, after winning the Ontario Colleges Athletic Association (OCAA) championship at Sheridan College on Feb. 23, it's all forgotten now.

From Jan. 11 to Feb. 3, the Lakers lost five of their last seven. When it seemed they were fading, the Lakers did a complete 180, winning five games in a row, all in straight sets, leading to the gold medal match in the OCAA championship.

"We were just peaking at the right time," says captain and setter Taylor Biebly. "That was exactly our focus all year was to win at the right times, at provincial and now, at nationals."

One of these matches was against the Niagara College Knights, who were ranked No. 3 in Canada at the time.

"We have a lot of confidence in our three biggest blockers up front," says head coach Eric Yung. "But we are just as confident in our three defenders in the back. If one player misses it, they know the other is going to get it."

The 3-2 victory over the Mohawk Mountaineers of Hamilton earned the Lakers their first provincial title in the team's history.

The Lakers have an arsenal of talent starting with the Leblanc Brothers, Andre and Adam of Sudbury. Standing at six-foot seven-inch and six-foot eight-inch respectively they are an intimidating defensive pairing that seems to stifle every attack.

Yung says he likes the match up against the Outoaouais Griffons of Quebec City.

"I think our size and our blocking is going to give us an advantage," says Yung.

"We go into every match with confidence. We're a tough team to score against."

Completing their frontline is Frankie Edgecomb, of Elmvale, Ont., the OCAA championship's Most Valuable Player.

Edgecomb was an unstoppable force for the Lakers, registering 16 kills, six digs and 19 points in the final match against Mohawk.

"I think the older guys that we do have will rise to this level," says Biebly. "For a lot of the guys, this will be their last games so, they don't want to end with a sour taste in their mouths."

The provincial title made the Lakers shoot up the national standings, jumping from No. 10 to No. 3 in the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association ranks.

TEAM PROFILES

Rookie leads the No.2 Blues

By JAMES CHUNG
Staff Writer

There's nothing blue about being the second-highest ranking volleyball team in the country, but the Capilano Blues will have their eyes on the ultimate achievement.

The Capilano University Blues, of North Vancouver, B.C., enters this men's volleyball national championships as the second-seed of the top eight volleyball programs in Canada.

The Blues ended their regular season with a 15-9 record in the Pacific West division (PacWest) in a turnaround season compared to their 8-16 record last season.

The Blues have already brought home some hardware prior to the nationals at the 2012-13 PacWest Volleyball Awards.

Blues left side and libero, Dan Caverly, from Port Moody, B.C., was named as one of the members of this year's PacWest Men's First-Team All-Stars team.

Blues rookie right side, Jarrett Massey, from West Kelowna, B.C., was named to the PacWest Men's All-Rookie team.

Head coach Nathan Bennett took home the Men's Coach of the Year honours.

"I imagine this place will be full and loud and the home fans cheering their team on, which is great. I love, and I'm sure all our guys love, being in that sort of atmosphere."

"As far as I'm concerned, we're going to battle. We're here to win this thing, and I'm sure every team is. It's going to be a good fight. They're [the Knights] a big team and we're looking forward to the challenge."

Dan Caverly, who was named a PacWest First-Team all-star, digs out a hit for the Capilano University Blues.

Submitted photo

Mariners looking for a chance for revenge

The Mariners' setter Adam Tishenko was named to his conference's second all-star team.

Submitted photo

By JAMES CHUNG
Staff Writer

The Vancouver Island University Mariners men's volleyball team will see some familiar faces at this year's Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) national championships.

The Mariners, from Nanaimo, B.C., won the silver medal at the Pacific West (PacWest) provincial championships, and it has earned them a spot at the nationals as the fifth-seed amongst eight top teams in Canada.

They will look to go for the gold medal, but it is the silver lining in the story leading to the nationals. Based on the bracket, if everything falls into place, the Mariners could potentially face the team that beat them in the PacWest provincials for the gold medal, the Capilano University Blues, of North Vancouver, B.C.

The Blues, ranked second going into this year's nationals, will face the seventh-seed and host team, the Niagara College Knights in the opening round.

The Mariners will face the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) Trojans, of Calgary, Alta., in the first-round.

The Mariners were able to take home some individual awards at this year's 2012-13 PacWest Volleyball Awards.

Mariners' middle, Lee Hamilton, of Regina, Sask., won the PacWest Men's Player of the Year and was named to the PacWest First-Team All-Stars team.

Adam Tishenko, the Mariners' setter from Vernon, B.C., and Tory Zaytsoff, the Mariners' left side from Nelson, B.C., were both named to the PacWest Second-Team All-Stars team.

Zach Grigg, the rookie left side from Nelson, B.C., won the PacWest Men's Rookie of the Year award and was named to the PacWest All-Rookie team.

The Mariners, who ended the regular season with a record of 16-8 and ahead of their PacWest rivals in the Blues, will have an opportunity to take home more than just bragging rights – they will have an opportunity to bring home a national championship gold medal, and the first obstacle will be the Trojans.

Knights' Petrusma makes list of top players and coaches

Individual performances and contributions to team success set 12 men apart as player of the year, coach of the year and 10 All-Canadians at the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association [CCAA] Men's Volleyball awards banquet held as part of the 2013 Ironwood Wealth Management Group CCAA Men's Volleyball National Championship Wednesday night. Niagara College Knights' Shayne Petrusma took home hardware as an All-Canadian.

Alwyn Piche, of the Keyano College Huskies men's volleyball team, is the 2012-13 CCAA Player of the Year. The fifth-year left side hitter finished his four-year career with the Huskies as the Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference's [ACAC] all-time leader in kills, aces, and blocks. This year marks the second time Piche was won the CCAA's top individual volleyball award, having earned the same honour for his play during the 2008-09 season.

Alwyn Piche - Player of the year
ACAC - Kayano College

Wayne Harris, head coach of the Redeemer University College Royals, is the 2013 CCAA Men's Volleyball Coach of the Year. Since joining the Royals in 2008, Harris has helped build the Redeemer men's volleyball program into one of the top teams in the OCAA [Ontario Colleges Athletic Association].

This season's CCAA All-Canadian selections include: from the PACWEST Rex Sutton (Douglas) and Lee Hamilton (Vancouver Island University), from the ACAC William Gelderman (Red Deer College King's) and Alwyn Piche (Keyano), from the OCAA Shayne Petrusma (Niagara College), Phillipe Yeldon (Algonquin College) and Frankie Edgecombe (Nipissing University), from the Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec [RSEQ] Alyson Francillon (St. Jean-sur-Richelieu) and Marc-André Morency (Limoilou), and from the Atlantic Collegiate Athletic Association [ACAA] Mike Wilson (University of King's College).

Wayne Harris - Coach of the year
OCAA - Redeemer College

The 10 student-athletes honoured are selected individually by their conferences based on their individual performance, and contributions to both their team and sport.

Ray Sarkis, CCAA men's volleyball national convener, commented, "These student-athletes represent the pinnacle of CCAA men's volleyball. Each player has worked extremely hard and should be very proud of their accomplishments."

This season's 10 All-Canadian selections were presented with plaque-mounted certificates of achievement provided by the CCAA and glass engraved awards courtesy of the Niagara College Department of Athletics and Recreation.

Player of the Year Piche led his Huskies team to a record of 16-4 and a bronze medal finish at the ACAC Championship. The bronze medal is the first in Keyano men's volleyball history.

Piche's outstanding season saw the six-foot-three native of La Loche, Sask., finish among the ACAC's leaders in total points (324), kills (259), service aces (42), blocks (24) and digs (123).

After receiving the award Piche stated, "It's an honour. All of the players nominated would have been excellent choices. It's a great way to finish my CCAA playing career."

The other player of the year nominees were Lee Hamilton, of Vancouver Island University (PACWEST), Phillipe Yeldon, of Algonquin College (OCAA), Alyson Francillon, of CÉGEP St-Jean-Sur-Richelieu (RSEQ), and Mike Wilson, of the University of King's College (ACAA).

Piche received the award at the Coca-Cola CCAA Championship Awards Banquet as part of the 2013 Ironwood Wealth Management Group CCAA Men's Volleyball National Championship being hosted by Niagara College in Welland.

Piche receives a customized ring provided by Jostens, the official ring supplier of the CCAA Championship Awards Banquet.

Coach of the Year Harris led the Royals to an impressive 14-4 record, and a tie for first-place in the competitive OCAA West Division. The Royals also captured a bronze medal, their third in four seasons, at the OCAA Championship hosted by Sheridan College.

Sarkis, Niagara College director of athletics, noted, "Wayne's built a very strong program at Redeemer. The Royals have risen to the top thanks to his coaching experience and great recruiting, and they've enjoyed great results this year."

Harris' Royals ranked as high as No. 2 in the CCAA in season rankings, and won 11 regular season matches between Nov. 16 and Jan. 26. Harris received the award and a customized ring provided by Jostens.

Alwyn Piche, named player of the year, comes down with a kill.
Submitted photos

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The Top 10 to watch

Niagara College Knights
#5 Shayne Petrusma

Position: **Outside hitter**
Height: **6'6"**
Hometown: **Burlington, Ontario**
Year: **5**

Since bringing his skills from McMaster University of Hamilton, Shayne Petrusma has been an unstoppable force this year for the Niagara Knights. He just became the fifth Knight in Niagara College history to achieve All-Canadian status.

This Paramedic student led the Ontario Colleges Athletic Association (OCAA) in kills, points and kills-per-set for much of the season. He has been recognized as a Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) volleyball player of the month, OCAA athlete of the week and was the Most Valuable Player of the 2013 Niagara Men's Volleyball Invitational, where the Knights won gold.

His imposing stature and vicious serve make him a serious asset for the home team.

Nipissing University Lakers
#11 Frankie Edgecombe

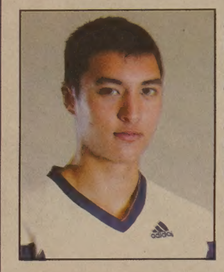
Position: **Middle**
Height: **6'5"**
Hometown: **Elmvale, Ontario**
Year: **5**

Frankie Edgecomb just made history at the OCAA championships as the Lakers captured their first provincial title. Edgecomb was named MVP of the tournament and an All-Canadian. He has proven to be highly versatile, as he has played three different positions throughout the season.

As one of the three captains on the team, Edgecomb leads by example with amazing displays of athleticism and strength.

Not only does he dominate at volleyball, but he is also a defencemen for Canada's national ball hockey team.

Capilano University Blues
#5 Dan Caverly



Position: **Left side / Libero**
Height: **6'1"**
Hometown: **Port Moody, British Columbia**
Year: **4**

Dan Caverly is ranked among the highest in the tournament in kills with 349 kills in 89 sets. This puts the PACWEST all-star at No. 7 in Canada. The fourth hasn't slowed down since capture the BCCAA Rookie of the Year back in 2010

For Carverly, volleyball is literally in his blood, as he and his twin sister, Jacqueline lead their respective provincial leagues in digs for Capilano University of North Vancouver.

With the ability to play the defensive Libero position, and still register kills at the left side position, Caverly is a highly skilled and versatile weapon for the Blues.

UKC Blue Devils
#8 Michael Wilson

Position: **Middle**
Height: **6'3"**
Hometown: **Toronto, Ontario**
Year: **4**

Not only did Michael Wilson win Atlantic Collegiate Athletic Association (ACAA) player of the year, but also he was the only player from that league whose stats broke him into Canada's Top 10. Wilson is ranked at No. 10 in Canada for blocks, with 39 in 45 sets, earning him an 87 per cent blocking average. The University of King's College Blue Devils should be confident in Wilson's ability to stifle any attacks from the opponents.

Vancouver Island University Mariners
#2 Lee Hamilton

Position: **Middle**
Height: **6'7"**
Hometown: **Regina, Saskatchewan**
Year: **5**

With Lee Hamilton standing at the net, the Mariners side is nearly impenetrable. He is ranked No. 1 in Canada in blocks with 81 in 76 sets giving him a blocking average of 1.07. He is also in the top 10 in kills in the Pacific Western Athletic Association (PACWEST).

He was named a CCAA All-Canadian, a PACWEST 1st league All-Star and PACWEST Tournament All-Star at Provincials. After recovering from a stress fracture part way through the season, Hamilton has been able to lead the Mariners to success when it was expected that this year would be a transitional year for the team.

Both offensively and defensively, Hamilton can shut out opponents.

Cégep Outaouais Griffons
#1 Jean-Phillppe Desjardins

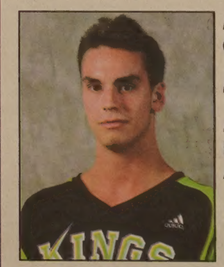
Position: **Middle**
Height: **6'8"**
Hometown: **Gatineau, Quebec**
Year: **3**

After winning back-to-back victories in the Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec (RESQ) Desjardin is poised to help Outaouais capture a national title. He has struggled with injuries earlier, but has recovered quite well. According to his coach, Desjardin is a top blocker and a key attacker.

The six-foot eight-inch middle is No. 3 in Canada in blocks with a 41 blocks in 36 sets giving him a blocking average of 1.14. Playing in only his third year, Desjardin has developed very quickly as a top-level player.

His intimidating presence in front of the net, leading the rest of his nimble teammates, makes the Griffons a contender.

Red Deer College Kings
#7 Timothy Finnigan



Position: **Outside Hitter**
Height: **6'4"**
Hometown: **Red Deer, Alberta**
Year: **3**

After playing for two years with their top conference rival, the SAIT Trojans, Finnigan returns to play for his home team of Red Deer in his final season.

He packs a fierce serve, putting him in the Top 10 for service aces in the CCAA. He has been a three-time Player of the Match, two-time RDC Male Athlete of the Week and ACAC Male Athlete of the Week.

Finnigan follows in a long line of talented players from the ACAC making Red Deer a dominant team and a favourite to win.

SAIT Polytechnic Trojans
#11 Scott Lesher

Position: **Outside hitter**
Height: **6'2"**
Hometown: **Lacombe, Alberta**
Year: **5**

Lesher finished the 2012-13 season with 1,065 career kills, rewriting the conference's record books and shattering the former record set by Pat Dunsmore of SAIT by 110 kills.

Lesher finished the regular season with 237 kills through 76 sets – an average of 3.1 that ranked 10th in the ACAC. He also dug 159 balls for an average of 2.1 per set, second on the Trojans' roster. Lesher played for four years at Briercrest College in Caronport, Sask.

He has been a welcome addition. In his last year, Lesher looks to bring an intimidating offensive presence at the net, worthy of a championship win.

TEAM PROFILES

Calgary team seeks top spot

By JAMES CHUNG
Staff Writer

The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) Trojans are seeking a national championship in men's volleyball after posting an 18-5 regular season record.

The Trojans, based in Calgary, Alta., won silver at this year's Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference (ACAC) provincial championships, and fell short of the gold medal to the Red Deer College Kings, of Red Deer, Alta.

Both the Kings and Trojans play in the ACAC, and the conference holds the record for most national championship wins with 18.

The No.1 seeded Kings may have the upper edge with regard to championship wins tying the all-time record with 10 wins, and they also hold the record for the longest championship winning streak with eight consecutive championship wins from 2000 to 2007. However, the No.4 seeded Trojans will have an opportunity to face-off against the Kings in the semi-finals pending how the teams play in the opening round of the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) men's volleyball national championships here.

The Trojans took home two individual awards at this year's ACAC volleyball awards with outside hitters, Darcee Froese, of Red Deer, Alta., and Scott Lesher, of Lacombe, Alta., being named to the ACAC First-Team All-Stars team.

Froese, the team captain, was a member of the Second-Team All-Stars squad last season, and has a chance to lead his team to its first-ever national championship.

Froese says he felt good when he heard the news about being named a PacWest First-Team All-Star.

"There were a lot of good players named to the list, so it was definitely an honour to be amongst them," says Froese.

Scott Lesher jumps up to tip the ball over the net.

Submitted photo

"I think we've been preparing well the past few weeks. The team is definitely excited to be here. We've been working hard the last few weeks and we're feeling ready to go."

Lesher will represent as a member of the ACAC First-Team All-Star team for a fourth time this season and he finished the season with 1,065 career kills, setting a new conference record previously held by a SAIT Trojan, Pat Dunsmore.

Coach Andy Hayher expects the team to play to their ability, to do their jobs, and to "focus on the little things, and the outcome will sort of take care of itself in my view.

"If we just focus on the things that we need to do well, we'll put ourselves in a good position for a good opportunity to see success here."

Froese says it's a cool chance to get outside of Alberta, and he feels the Athletic Centre at the Welland campus is "a good venue."

The Trojans' opening round matchup at the nationals will be against the fifth-seed team, the Vancouver Island University Mariners, on Thursday at 3 p.m.

Red Deer Kings hope to regain champ status

By STEPHANIE TAYLOR
Staff Writer

The Red Deer Kings devotes a lot of attention to recruitment and it shows.

The Kings are a dynasty team, winning the national title from 2000-2008.

After soaring through the regular season with only one loss, they're coming into this tournament with a lot of stamina and star power.

Tim Finnigan is a solid player all teams should look out for. He was the Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference Championship tournament Most Valuable Player.

"He is one of our captains and leads this team vocally and with his strong and consistent play," says Head Coach Aaron Schulha.

Braden O'Toole and Chris Osborn are also players to watch, as they have been performing at a high level lately and Schulha expects them to "continue that strong play."

According to Schulha, once you get to the National Championships, "everyone is a threat. Everyone is there for the same reason and with being the No. 1 seed, everyone wants to knock you off that much more."

Middle Trent Schmidt says, "It's definitely exciting, seeing all the old coaches and staff gives me extra motivation to play better."

Schulha says the team's starting line-up is much different from last year, adding, they have one returning starter from last year and six new athletes all together.

"The biggest thing is that we work hard on the recruiting front and focus on developing our student-athletes in all facets of their college life."

— with files from Jeff Johnston

The 2012-13 Red Deer Kings men's volleyball team.

Submitted photo

TEAM PROFILES

Teamwork key for underdog King's

By JEFF JOHNSTON
Staff Writer

Everyone likes an underdog.

The eighth seed University of King's College (UKC) Blue Devils, of Halifax, are ready for action at the Canadian College Athletic Association Men's Volleyball Championships at Niagara College's, Welland campus Athletic Centre.

The Atlantic Collegiate Athletic Association's [ACAA] top team will be in tough against the Red Deer Kings, Canada's No. 1 team.

Although the competition will be fierce, the Blue Devils still bring the best talent the East coast has to offer.

UKC's middle Mike Wilson captured ACAA Player of the Year as the team won the ACAA championships and Justin Lynch won ACAA Coach of the Year.

Lynch says the keys to their game will be "playing smart."

"Our biggest strength is our collective ability," he says. "We're not as physical as some of the other teams, so we have to focus on what we can do and not do things we aren't capable of doing."

The Blue Devils will rely on Wilson for the same calibre of play he brought to win the provincial title.

"What makes Mike our best player is that he is so consistent," says Lynch. "He always makes the smart play, he blocks well. We don't need to activate him, he know exactly what to do."

According to Lynch, their biggest threat will be their "own anxiety" and "preparation" will be key in curving their nerves.

UKC has been to nationals before, so they do have experience playing at the highest level.

The Kings have a long tradition of winning, as the winning team from 2000 to 2008.

The Blue Devils will play the first match of the tournament at 1 p.m. at the Niagara College Welland campus.

For game re-caps, go to niagara-news.com.

The University of King's College Blue Devils run some drills at practice yesterday morning.

Submitted photo

Smaller Outaouias Griffons stand tall, aim high

By STEPHANIE TAYLOR
Staff Writer

Other teams have commented on Griffons' smaller size, but head coach Paul Tamburrini, says they can use it to their advantage.

"We play a lot bigger than we are," he says. "We don't usually play to the same style as some of the other teams."

The Outaouias Griffons are coming off a solid season, winning 15 of 18 games. They captured the Division 1 RSEQ Championship after defeating in three sets the Titans Limiolou, who had only suffered one loss all season. This is their second consecutive championship tournament appearance.

According to Tamburrini, Red Deer is the "obvious threat going into the tournament, as the top seed. Right now, we are focusing on getting past our first match against Nipissing, a big, strong, and dynamic opponent."

Phillip Carrier, Hugo Lachance-Berthel and Jean-Phillipe Desjardins were selected to the first team. Carrier was named the provincial tournament Most Valuable Player, while Lachance-Berthel was named November's Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association Athlete of the Month.

When the Griffons played in the Niagara Invitational, they were without Desjardins and lost. He is now in good health so it could be a game changer.

"Desjardins is a top blocker, top attacker and top player," says Tamburrini. "He was injured last time we were here, so we're excited to have him back."

Team captain and libero Alexandre Thibault says first contact will be most important. "We're going to focus on our side of the court and try to control the play."

Last year's national championship, the Griffons came up short. Tamburrini says their team goal setting was different.

"We put everything into achieving our goal of winning Provincials, whereas this year Provincials was more of a stepping stone."

"We are not any taller than we were last year but my team coming into this tournament is a lot stronger and able to put more balls away on side-out and in transition, still with solid serve receive and tough defence. We've been tapering off the strength training and skill development and focusing more on systems and team play. With eight players returning from last year's roster, we are expecting a better result."

— with files from Jeff Johnston

The Griffons won 15 of 18 games en route to the conference championships.

Submitted photo

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Marc Garneau, Canada's first astronaut and federal leadership candidate, landed at Niagara College on Wednesday to visit science labs and discuss his vision to reform the student-assistance program

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January 18, 2013
Vol 44 • Issue 7
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Idle No More hits Niagara
By STEVEN AULD
Special to Niagara News
Sounds of drum beats and chanting filled the halls as a group of Idle No More movement protesters surprised Niagara College students and staff at the Welland campus Friday. The noon-time protest was in recognition of issues affecting aboriginal communities around Canada.
"We are here in solidarity with Chief Theresa Spence. She is on a hunger strike. She's been on a hunger strike for a month now," said the organizer of the demonstration, former Niagara College student and Caledonia protester Jam McGean.
Spence, the chief of Attawa kat., has been on a hunger st since early December. Her hu strike doesn't allow for solid f and she's only consumed fish and medicinal tea for the pa weeks. Spence took up the strike to try to secure a with Prime Minister Steph Johnston and the Assemb Nations (AFN). Those came to fruition the day tests, although the AF Harper and Johnston and at different sites.
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